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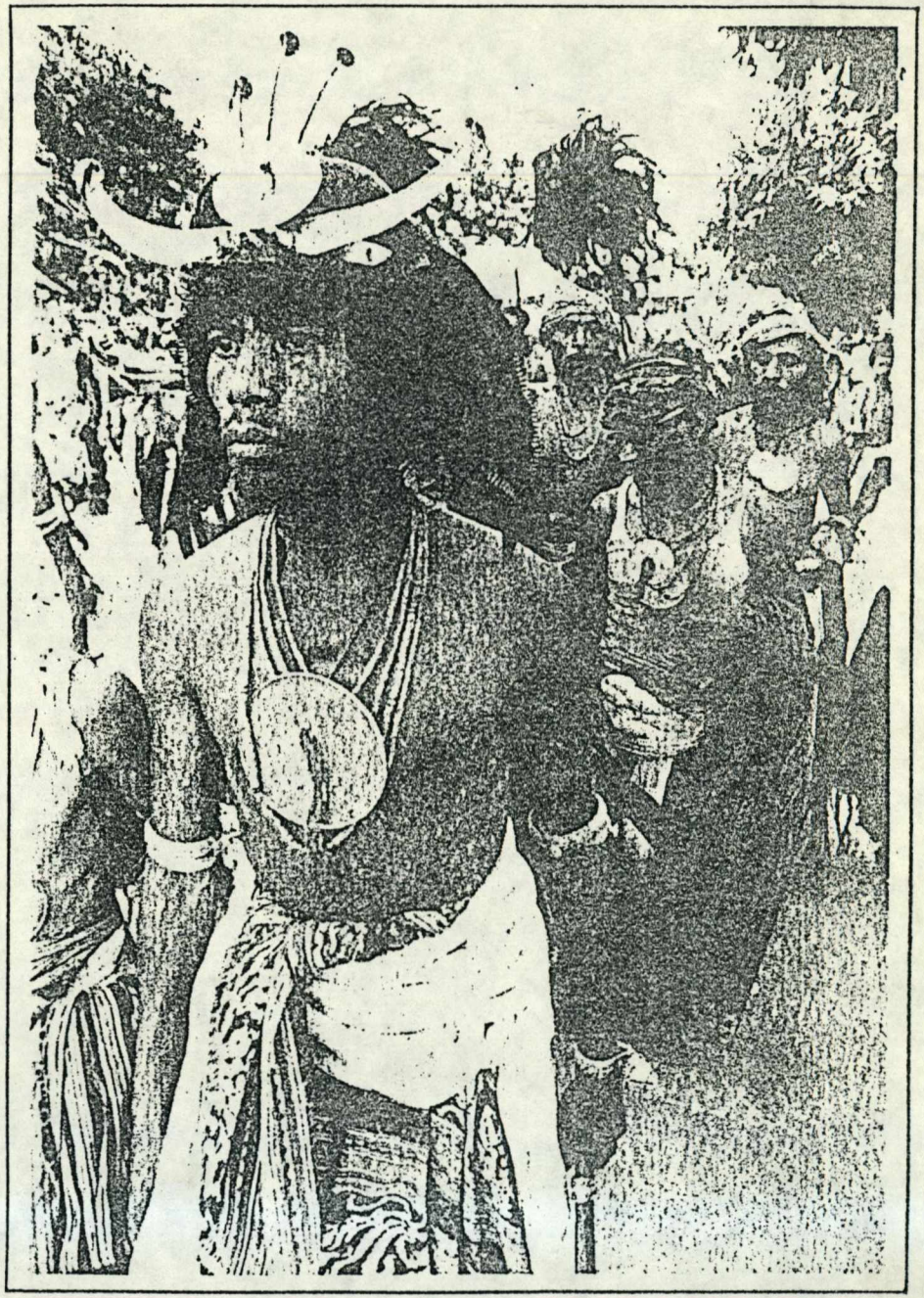
TIMORESE ELITES



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Timorese Elites

ABILIO DE ARAUJO
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Edited by JILL JOLLIFFE and BOB REECE

Canberra, 1975

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PREFACE

After more than 450 years of colonial rule, the isolated territory of East (Portuguese) Timor is at last beginning to emerge into the modern world. The April 1974 coup spelled the inevitable dissolution of Portugal's colonial empire and in Timor it stimulated a ferment of political activity of which this pamphlet is a product.

The author, Abilio de Araujo, belongs to a new generation of Timorese students. Educated at the seminary of Dare and the Lyceum of Dili, he won a scholarship to Portugal to study economics. As things were then, he seemed destined to take his place among the class of Timorese who have traditionally assisted Portuguese in retaining and administering the remote 'overseas province'.

Instead, he became caught up in the tide of events following the coup. Together with other student activists of the Casa dos Timores, the headquarters of Timorese students in Lisbon, he began to see his own society in a new light. The analysis which he offers here marks a new stage in the politicisation of the Timorese people and their liberation from the colonial mentality.

In a country where illiteracy is estimated at more than 90 per cent, any educated person may be considered as belonging to the elite. And it is this class, divided in its support for the three rival political parties formed since April 1974, which will help to decide Timor's future.

Each party represents a radically different view of what that future should be. APODETI (Popular Democratic Association of Timorese) wants integration with Indonesia, which already controls the western half of the island; UDT (Democratic Union of Timorese) favours a continued dependent relationship with Portugal; and FRETILIN (Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor) calls for complete independence within five years.

Not surprisingly, each claims to have the majority of popular support, although how this could be ascertained is difficult to imagine. Illiteracy, lack of political experience and unfavourable geographical conditions make it impracticable to conduct a plebiscite. If the principle of self-determination is to be observed, the elite will play a vital part.

In this light, an analysis of the historical role of elites in Timor is particularly

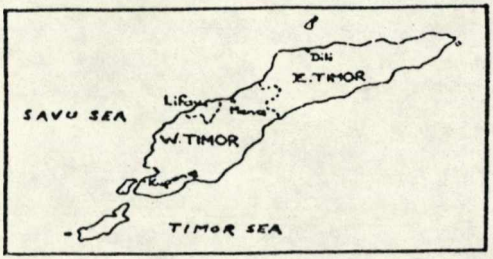
timely. Readers may also be surprised to discover that anti-colonialism in Timor has a long and proud tradition. Uprisings against the Portuguese in the early eighteenth century and in 1912 only failed due to defections from the rebel leadership. As recently as 1959, several hundred Timorese were killed in an uprising led by Moluccan separatists.

Timorese nationalism is a significant and developing force which must not be overlooked in the shaping of Australia's policy towards South-East Asia. This pamphlet will serve to reassure those who may have felt that the East Timorese are not capable of deciding their own future.

J.J.

B.R.

August, 1975



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TIMORESE ELITES

This is an analysis of the various elites known in Timor during the different stages of colonial domination and of the social processes by which they evolved.

The power of these elites is central to the colonial history of Timor. To attribute to it a secondary role would be to ignore the real reasons for what the colonialists called the 'patriotism of the people of Timor towards Portugal'.

The Elites of Colonial Territories

In order to function, colonialism needs the support of some local social group. It is through such a group that colonialism ensures the realisation of its aims: possession and exploitation of the land and its mineral resources and the establishment of commercial zones. In other words, the exploitation of the wealth of colonial peoples and their consequent oppression. Without the support of this social group, colonialism encounters the opposition of the whole society to exploitation and foreign domination.

History tells us that the implantation of colonialism in Africa, America and Asia (Timor) did not follow a peaceful course. Struggles and wars of resistance took place. The defeat of the colonial peoples was often a consequence of the imbalance of forces: the oppressors were better equipped (firearms, etc.) while the indigenous peoples were in a far inferior military position (arrows, spears, etc.). With reference to Timor, the former governor Affonso de Castro wrote in 1864: '. . . against them [the Timorese] we were favoured by the superiority of our equipment'.[1]

But it was not this imbalance which prevented further wars of liberation from taking place. If struggles did happen they did not involve the whole population against the intruders, but were between anti-colonialist elements of the local population and the colonial power aided by other sectors of the population. It is within this local sector that the colonialist seeks support and collaboration. At this stage they exchange favours: the local group offers guarantees for the establishment of colonial rule and in return receives privileges -rights and honours– not shared by others. And so an elite is created. Its power increases as the grip of colonialism tightens. In the first phase the colonising power frequently looks for the group which holds political power in the traditional society. It is this group which colonialism makes its ally.

1. Affonso de Castro, *As Possesões Portuguezas na Oceania* (Lisbon, 1867).

The First Elite in Timor

In Timor, Portuguese colonialism looked for support among the *liurais*.[2] Can there be any other explanation for the conversion of the Queen of Mena, the liurai of Lifau and other liurais, and the gift of their kingdoms to Portugal than that it was a mutual compromise between the Portuguese and the local authorities, which allowed the former to exploit the sandalwood of Timor and prevented the local people from rebelling against them?[3]

> The last words spoken by the Queen were followed by the cries of the people listening that they only wanted to embrace the Law of Christ. Christian teaching began immediately and the Queen was crowned and baptised in a solemn ceremony on the day of St. John the Baptist (June 1641). The heir to the throne was baptised at the same time and was named D. João in honour of the day by the Rev. Antonio de S. Jacinto. He in turn offered the holy precursor the liberty to convert the people of the kingdom (like a Prime Minister who by the act of baptism acknowledges the teaching of Christ).[4]

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2. Indigenous chiefs; according to Timorese sources, the original form was *liu-rai* and derives from the main Timorese dialect, Tetum–the word *liu* meaning unlimited and *rai* meaning land. Thus, literally: 'one who has unlimited land'.

   According to C.R. Boxer: 'The island was [in 1661] divided into two roughly equal districts, the eastern being called Bellos (Belum) and the western Serviāo (Survio). . . The chiefs of the Timorese tribes were known as *Liu-Rais*, but the Portuguese termed them 'kings', dividing the island into sixty-two petty kingdoms, forty-six of which were in the province of Bellos and sixteen in Serviao' (C.R. Boxer, 'Portuguese Timor: a rough island story: 1515-1960', *History Today*, x (1960), p. 352).

3. The area spoken of here was the traditional seat of the Black Portuguese (or Topasses) who were a peculiar social group made up of the offspring of Timorese women and 'Portuguese soldiers, Macao and Chinese traders and Dutch deserters' (F.J. Ormeling, *The Timor Problem: a geographical interpretation of an underdeveloped island*, 2nd impression, Jakarta, 1957, p. 100). Based in Lifau, they controlled the sandalwood trade. They achieved this control through the political power they held over the local liurais, under whose orders Timorese in the interior felled sandalwood and delivered it to the coast for sale by the Black Portuguese who became immensely wealthy from the trade. The political control of this early *mestiço* elite was crucial to the successful colonial penetration of Timor by the Portuguese.

   Lifau is in what is now the Portuguese enclave of Oē Cussi, which until this day has been controlled by the two powerful Black Portuguese families of de Hornay and da Costa. The ancient kingdom of Mena was some kilometres east, situated between the present villages of Atapupu and Wini in what is now West (Indonesian) Timor. Of this kingdom, Ormeling writes: 'Research by Roman Catholic missionaries established that the chief village of this kingdom, the present kampung Mena, was a center of missionary activity in Portuguese times (Smit 1947). In those days both a seminary and church were found there. . . The radja [liurai] of Mena is also mentioned repeatedly in the old Company's reports. The Dutch signed their first sandalwood contract with him.' (p. 217).

4. Luiz de Cacegas, *Historia de S. Domingos, particular do Reyno, e conquistas de Portugal* (Lisbon, 1767) p. 675.

> The priests never forgot the important mission they had to accomplish and began to convert the entire royal family and people of Lifau so that within a few days, on 1 July 1641, the baptism ceremony took place.[5]

What would have been the outcome of the military campaigns of Governor Celestino da Silva at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century if he had not been assisted by the liurais who became his allies?

Da Silva managed to subdue all the 'rebels', that is, all those who opposed Portuguese domination, particularly the kingdom of Manu-Fahi and its liurai D. Boaventura.[6] He succeeded because he had the support of the liurais who in the meantime rose within the colonial order to the rank of major and lieutenant colonel of the second rank! This first elite was basically made up of liurais and *datos*[7] who little by little submitted to the colonial yoke.

This elite did not lose anything when it made a pact with colonialism. On the contrary, in addition to the powers which the traditional society recognised or was forced to recognise—judicial, administrative, military, etc.—new powers were conferred on them by colonialism. The liurais who did not resist colonial rule saw their domains expand at the cost of the 'rebel' kingdoms.

It is through this elite that colonialism justifies its presence, recommending peaceful association and collaboration. It is this elite which, favoured by the new social order, placates those who feel disadvantaged by the new system and wish to abolish it. This elite is really an intermediary between the colonial power and the oppressed majority. This majority is never benefited in any way and when it wishes to rebel it finds that its foreign enemy (colonialism) has become an ally of this local social group—the elite—which in this case is made up of the traditional power holders. It is thus unable to engage in armed struggle.

In this way colonialism succeeds in putting into practice the exploitation which is its first and ultimate aim.

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5. *ibid.*, p.677.

6. Boaventura was the leader of Portuguese Timor's most important uprising against the Portuguese in 1912. Although by means of a *sange conseguiu*—'oath of blood'—he managed to obtain an alliance with all the liurais of Timor, when the rebellion took place he was betrayed by some of them. Little more is known outside Timor about the rebellion, but for the Melbourne *Argus* reports, see Appendix, p.8. In 1975, those pressing for the independence of East Timor regard Boaventura as a national hero and see themthemselves following in his tradition. His sayings are currently being used as political slogans by FRETILIN.

7. Timorese nobility from whom the liurais were derived.

Successive Elites in Timor

But colonialism never rests. It knows that the situation cannot be maintained indefinitely. It knows also that this elite, liurais but still Timorese, may sooner or later become hostile. And thus it introduces its most powerful weapon—the Christian religion, the most effective pacifier of rebellious spirits. But propagation is not easy. Baptism for the sake of baptism could be achieved by a small group and the Portuguese missionaries could well manage that. But what is most important is that religious conditioning leads to radical changes in the people's way of thinking and this can only be achieved through an educational system intended to prepare indigenous people to take over the work of proselytisation.

> Three missionaries are quite sufficient for the type of work which is now being undertaken; but in order to spread Christianity and convert to our holy religion the thousands of pagans who live on this island, three is too little. Religious education is a great medium of civilisation and in Timor where we lack and will continue to lack the power to dominate these people, we must use words to conquer what cannot be conquered by the sword. Through religious education we founded a colony; through religious education we must maintain it.[8]
>
> . . . For a Timorese, to be a Christian means to be a subject of His Majesty the King of Portugal and this is the important point politically. All things considered, and regardless of preconceptions, religious conversions in Timor have more political than religious significance. Portugal acquired subjects but the Church did not increase its following since most of those converted were Christians in name only.[9]

And so there was established at the end of the nineteenth century the first college in Timor at Soibada with the aim of preparing teacher-catechists as well as educating the sons of liurais.

> Since we were responsible for the colonial administration we suggested that a college be founded to educate the children of the principal indigenous chiefs. This provided primary education for the first and second grades and we are convinced now that the best results can be expected from such an institution . . . It is also of utmost importance that the Timorese rulers know about our civilisation, which is the only way of dealing with the customs of these barbaric peoples.[10]

From this college came the first Timorese *letrados*.[11] This new social group, originating from the strata of liurais and datos, together with a few from the people, exerted an important influence on the population. These new elements from the traditional society were respected and admired because they were capable of reading and writing. Although the hereditary nobility continued to hold political power, this new social group was just as admired because it had succeeded in adapting to colonial values. It was another kind of nobility emerging. Colonialism discovered that it was necessary to support this new group which accepted the policy of propagating the Christian relig-

8. De Cacegas, *op.cit.*, p.399.
9. De Castro, *op.cit.*, p.29.
10. *ibid.*, p.393
11. The learned.

ion and would never turn against it because of the privileges received through contact with colonial culture. It was also necessary to, on the one hand, give this group a status equal to that of the liurais and datos and, on the other, to remind them of the responsibilities attached to their status, –to maintain order and justice within a framework of collaboration, understanding and tolerance– tolerance (concepts widely diffused by the Christian religion). Later on from the same college came another group made up of civil servants who, together with the first group, constituted the subsequent elite. At the same time some elements of the old elite–the liurais–began losing their social position to the new letrados, some of whom having noble blood are used by the colonial power to take their places.

> . . . It became compulsory for every ruler who required confirmation to graduate from the college so that heads of kingdoms could be acquainted with our customs and our civilization.[12]

New social groups were successively formed. New kinds of elites emerged. The administrative division of Timor transformed the military commands into administrative *postos* and *circunscrições* administered by colonialists and Timorese educated at the religious colleges of Soibada, Maliana and Ossu. More recently we have a new kind of elite, more culturally developed and just as prestigious, from the seminary at Dare and the Lyceum at Dili.[13]

Portuguese colonialism reduced the power of the liurais and superimposed a new power which, because it was better adapted to reality, came to reinforce and perpetuate colonial dependence. The administrative framework appeared even more powerful to the people, supported as it was by the entire colonial structure. It was not only well equipped to oppress but also the cause of the liurais' political decline.

Generally speaking, when the new social forces appeared the power of the liurais was already decaying and they proved themselves incapable of commanding and of dictating laws to the people as in former times. The new elements in the civil service and in the ranks of the colonial army constituted the most highly developed elite that Timor has known until now.

The Future Elite

. . . While social change within the traditional society was taking place through the direct action of colonialism, new contradictions appeared in the system. The elite which it conceived and which was adequate at a certain phase of its evolution revealed itself as inadequate in a subsequent phase. That is the reason why it was necessary to find another form of elite with which it could

12. De Castro, *op.cit.*, p.394.

13. It is perhaps significant that a number of FRETILIN leaders were trained at this seminary.

make an alliance, otherwise its existence would be in jeopardy.

It is within this context that we must view the new policy of sending young Timorese to Portugal while at the same time proclaiming that '. . . it is of utmost urgency to create a new elite, made up of executives (heads of departments, technicians etc.) originating from the traditional society.'

But colonialism does not produce anything new. Elites have always existed. Their forms change with time. These changes are a consequence of the indubitable fact that there is a continual transformation and evolution of all things. The concept and the role of the elite never change; only its forms. . .

Therefore, colonialism through its faithful lackeys and servants must look within its system of justification for valid reasons to explain to the 'enlightened', because it has no explanation to give to the people. At that moment, like a drowning person who throws his arms around the first floating object, it usually finds assistance in demagogic phraseology impregnated with colonialist ideology, mystifying and obscure, as in: 'This elite is the condition *sine qua non* for order, development and progress in Timor'.

We have seen that this elite is in fact necessary for the survival of colonialism. But this policy, like many others, can prove to be a double-edged sword. This group of responsible civil servants, promoted because of their acceptance of colonialism's values, (civilisation and culture) may be its best ally but may also turn out to be its greatest enemy. This is what colonialism must prevent at all costs.

Therefore it tries to inculcate among the Timorese people the false idea that students must only study in order to complete their degrees and return home as quickly as possible because 'there is a whole series of problems which can only be resolved by their return'. But on the other hand, it tries to persuade the students that they must study in order to become 'the elite which Timor needs'. In order to win them over they are offered good jobs and consequently the less aware student only aspires to obtain his *canudo*,[14] thus developing a selfish attitude and forgetting the exploited and oppressed people.

All students who behave in this way become prominent and obtain full support from the establishment. Simultaneously, there is a whole process, overt or covert, directed by colonialism which leads these unfortunates to be accepted by the people who should call them traitors instead. This type of elite is the best ally of colonialism.

However, when it observes that its interests are not satisfied because colonialism itself imposes certain barriers, that is, when its interests conflict with

14. Degree; literally, scroll.

those of the colonial power, it changes into a mentor and apologist for the anti-colonialist struggle. Because this attitude results from the refusal of the former ally (colonialism) to share the cake that was promised and later denied, its situation in the post-colonial era is identical or even worse. It becomes the dominating force oppressing the people and simultaneously becomes the ally of other foreign economic forces with whom it undertakes an even more unbridled form of exploitation. This is the stage of neo-colonialism.

There remains however, the case of the 'mediocre' students, those who 'instead of studying become politically involved' and categorically refuse to become part of the new elite. As far as colonialism is concerned, the behaviour of these students 'goes against the purpose for which they were intended'. That is right! For once colonialism speaks the truth! In such a situation it must use every means to discredit the actions of the students in the eyes of the people and to isolate them. But sooner or later the people must distinguish who are their children and faithful friends.

Appendix

1 Capt. Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies . . .* (2 vols., London 1744), I, pp. 138-9:

> . . . The *Portugueze* of *Maccao* drove a very advantagious Trade to *Timor* for many Years, and finding the Natives inclined to be paſſive *Catholicks*, tried by fair Means to get the whole Government of the Country into the Church's Hands; but could not beguile them that Way, therefore they tried Force, and commenced a War, but to their Coſt they found, that the *Timoreans* would not loſe their Liberty for fear of the Loſs of Blood. They choſe one *Gonſales Gomez* their General. He was a Native of *Timor*, and had travelled to *Maccao* and *Goa*. He allowed the King of *Portugal* to be the Sovereign and Protector of their Country, and they would be his loyal Subjects, providing their Laws and Liberties might be ſecured to them.
>
> That War with the City of *Maccao* laſted about fifteen Years. It began about the Year 1688. and was not quite finiſhed in the Year

1703. and *Maccao* in the End was ruined by it, for it exhauſted both their Stock of Men and Money to ſuch a Degree, that of 1000 Citizens the Town had before the War, there was hardly fifty left at the End of it, and of forty Sail of trading Ships, not above five left.

The Vice-roy of *Goa* ſent an Embaſſy to *Gonſales Gomez*, in the Year 1698. to perſwade him to Peace, and to accept of a Governor General and an Archbiſhop from *Goa*, but to no Purpoſe, for they declared, that they would admit of no foreign Governors in their Country, either in Church or State.

II Excerpts from the Melbourne *Argus*, 1912:

Reports of the insurrection in Timor. . . show that the revolt is general. Ramea tribesmen have raided the port of Dilly. Many residents were murdered, and buildings burnt.

During the street fighting, Major Ingley and Lieutenant Silva, of the Portuguese Defence Force, and several soldiers, were killed. Their heads were cut off and stuck on poles.

Government-house has been entered by the natives and looted. *Feb. 19, 1912.*

A startling message was received in Lisbon yesterday. It contained a report of a great battle between the troops and the rebels.

Very heavy loss of life occurred. The rebels were defeated, leaving 3,000 dead. Four thousand of the rebels were captured. . .

. . . Early in February it was reported that a rebellion had broken out among the natives, and the Governor telegraphed to the Portuguese authorities, asking for a warship to be despatched. About the middle of that month reinforcements of 100 Europeans and 200 natives were sent to the island from Mozambique. The gunboat Patria was also despatched, and the Government made a statement that they considered these forces would be sufficient to re-establish order. In this the authorities were mistaken. . . a few days later they had to send instructions to Mozambique to despatch another full company of troops to Timor. . . In spite of all the efforts of the authorities they were unable to properly quell the disturbances. In April. . . a telegram from Timor [stated] that the situation there had grown worse. Fighting took place between the rebels and the Portuguese forces, but, aided by the guns of the Patria, the troops put the enemy to flight. Early in May further troops were despatched from Mozambique and from Lisbon, and towards the end of that month desultory fighting took place. Although the authorities realised that the position was becoming serious, no one anticipated that an engagement anything like that reported in today's cable message would take place. *Aug. 26, 1912.*